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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 001373

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AS S/E NATSIOS, AND AF/SPG  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON  
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TAGS: PREL PGOV KPKO UN AU SU

SUBJECT: ON THE ROAD AHEAD, MINAWI SEES ALL DEAD ENDS

REF: KHARTOUM 01337

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (S/NF) Characterizing the DPA as "dead, except to the U.S.," predicting that the UN/AU political process will fail, doubting that NCP policies toward Darfur can be changed through the 2009 elections and yet convinced that a return to war is useless, SLM leader Minni Minawi is seeking to chart a new--yet vague--course between adherence to the DPA and a return to armed struggle. During an August 30 meeting with Poloff, Minawi at turns suggested military cooperation with the SPLA and then asserted that the SLM could never form more than an electoral coalition with the SPLM. Minawi's shift in rhetoric comes after his August 29 return from three weeks in Darfur, where he had stared down a revolt within the political leadership of his movement and the UN/AU had discouraged him from attempts to bring DPA non-signatory factions under the SLM. Despite these frustrations, Minawi recalled how he has weathered three previous challenges to his leadership. Having proven himself a survivor, he was focused on finding a path for the next "three to four years" and welcomed dialogue with the USG as he considers the road ahead. CDA Fernandez will meet with Minawi on September 1. End summary.

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No DPA, No New Agreement, No War  
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¶2. (S/NF) In an August 30 meeting with Poloff after an extended trip to Darfur, Senior Assistant to the President and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leader Minni Minawi acknowledged that many, including President Bashir, had wondered if he would return to Khartoum. Reflective after three weeks spent throughout Darfur--and a short trip to Southern Sudan to meet with senior officials in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)--Minawi said that he is seeking to chart a middle course between adherence to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and a return to armed struggle. "The DPA is not successful, a new agreement will not be successful, and war will not be successful," he explained, ironically upbeat despite the absence of any viable options for the SLM's future.

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"DPA Dead"

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¶3. (S/NF) Minawi characterized the DPA as "dead, except in the U.S." While suggesting that it was time to adjust to this reality, he offered disjointed thoughts on his next steps. SLM commanders in and around El Fasher and in South Darfur were restless, often unresponsive to his leadership, and "abusing the name of the SLM." Minawi saw two solutions: 1) provision of food to stem the need for looting among his fighters who had no other source of support, and 2) military training, facilitated by the SPLA, to occupy the commanders. He said that many of the rogue fighters had no income and no choice but to steal either food or vehicles (to sell in Chad) to provide for themselves and their families.

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SPLA Military Cooperation, But Not on Secession  
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¶4. (S/NF) SPLA Chief of Staff Oyai Deng had supported SPLA-SLA cooperation during a recent meeting with Minawi in Juba. Minawi proposed that the training could involve about 500 commanders and could benefit from U.S. assistance. Acknowledging that it would be difficult to conduct such training without the knowledge of the National Congress Party (NCP), Minawi suggested that the commanders could go in groups of "two or three" by civilian aircraft from Khartoum to Juba. Minawi was contradictory in the ultimate aim of military cooperation with the SPLA. While an electoral coalition with the SPLM was possible for 2009, the SLM and Darfur could never support the South if it chose to secede, said Minawi--who hinted that he did not think the SPLM would participate in elections because it is focused on secession. However, he had come to realize that the NCP would also never

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allow free elections in Darfur and had lost hope in changing Khartoum's policies toward the region through the ballot box.

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UN/AU Process Excludes Key Groups  
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¶5. (S/NF) A successful outcome for the UN/AU political process was also doubtful, said Minawi. At least four key armed groups were excluded from the process: 1) A faction led by Adam Ali Shoggar in North Darfur; 2) The largest military wing of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) led by Abdullah Banda that has split from the leadership of Khalil Ibrahim (reftel); 3) A splinter group of former G-19 commander Adam Bakheit led by Omar Jelba and Ahmed Suleiman in North Darfur; and 4) A loosely-allied network of "bandits" in Jebel Marra who had split from the factions led by Abdulwahid al Nur and Ahmed Abdulshafie. If a new agreement were signed with only the Arusha participants, Minawi predicted that it would suffer the same fate as the DPA.

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Eliasson, Salim Discourage Minawi's Efforts  
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¶6. (S/NF) Minawi had raised these concerns during recent meetings with UN Envoy Jan Eliasson and AU Envoy Salim Ahmed Salim. Both envoys had brushed aside Minawi's views, saying that the inclusion of groups who did not participate in the early-August Arusha meeting would "create confusion." At the request of Shoggar and Banda, Minawi had planned to travel to North Darfur to discuss their accession to the DPA. However, Salim had urged him not to deal with the non-signatories outside the UN/AU process, and the AU helicopter previously scheduled to fly Minawi North was canceled after his meeting with Salim. In frustration, Minawi had raised his concern about the exclusion of certain armed groups from the political process with AU Force Commander Martin Luther Agwai, who replied that it was not his job to interfere in politics and that decisions on the political track (and on

the helicopter) were "out of our control." "Why are these people punishing me?" Minawi questioned, vowing to return to Darfur in five days to visit the commanders in North Darfur, with or without the AU transportation.

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Unrest within the SLM  
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¶ 7. (S/NF) Minawi had also staved down a leadership challenge during the recent meeting of the SLM Revolutionary Council in El Fasher. While Minawi was in North Darfur, SLM Secretary General Mustafa Tirab, acting "under the table" with the NCP, had hijacked the meeting's agenda, according to Minawi. Tirab had steered the discussion toward removal of Minawi as chairman of the SLM. After Minawi had arrived days later, he had confronted the Council and offered to resign if they cited their objections to his leadership. The delegates had then relented and returned to the initial agenda proposed by Minawi: increasing the size of the leadership and legislative councils and reforming internal party organs to reflect the political--rather than military--nature of the movement.

¶ 8. (S/NF) Confident that he had re-asserted his leadership, Minawi recalled three previous occasions when he had responded to unrest within the movement by offering to resign: once during the 2004 Haskanita conference, when he canceled a meeting with then-Deputy Secretary Zoellick to return to Darfur and confront challenges to his position inspired by Chadian emissaries and then-SLM humanitarian coordinator Suleiman Jamous; later during the Abuja talks when there was a plot to assassinate him on the Chadian border; and finally after Abuja, when he had initially refused the post of Senior Assistant to the President in response to objections from Tirab and the command leadership.

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Comment  
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¶ 9. (S/NF) Minawi asserts that his recent trip gave him a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamics in the field that he had lacked while in Khartoum. He sees "many hands"--non-signatory movements, the NCP, opposition political parties, and foreign governments--dividing the

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movements of Darfur, including his own SLM. Viewing the DPA, the UN/AU political process, and a renewed armed struggle as dead ends, Minawi is desperate to chart a new course, particularly in light of the unrest within his movement and the UN/AU's neglect of his role in the political process. He continues to value U.S. input on his next steps while realizing there are no great options. While USG support for SLM military training is in direct contravention of the sequencing of the DPA, the lack of food and basic medical care for the SLM fighters has caused the rise of banditry and could be addressed by a transparent and sustainable program for non-military logistical support. End comment.

FERNANDEZ